

TEACHING ENGLISH IN KOREA

by Bill Eggington

In a recent "Needs Assessment for Korea" discussion held at the Church College of Hawaii, it was pointed out quite forcibly by Koreans present that there is a great need for a strong TESL programme in Korea. Learning spoken English is looked upon as a method of social and economic advancement. At the present time, this desire is being channeled into semi-effective to ineffective programmes; thus frustration is common among Korean English learners. This paper will be a general overview of the problems and solutions that a TESL teacher would face if he were to teach in Korea.

As already stated, there is high motivation to learn English. Korea is becoming more and more westernized, and in particular, Americanized. English speaking companies are moving into many aspects of Korean life, thus causing a need for English speaking Korean businessmen and technicians. Higher education is also moving in the direction of western thought and thus western influence and inter-communication. Because of this, the English teacher will never lack good, highly motivated students.

However, many Koreans find English a very hard language to master. Hei Sook Lee, in an article in "Language Learning", says that

since Korean people who are now learning English, or intend to learn it, have the preconception that it is a very difficult language, they usually feel discouraged. The author believes it is urgent to destroy this preconceived notion.¹

He states that one of the most effective methods of overcoming this discouragement is to start off the English programme with English cognates that are very common in the Korean language. I will discuss cognates later in this paper.

The English learner in Korea also must overcome a series of man-made handicaps before he can begin to master English. His

largest problem is "forgetting" the English he has already learnt from the Government Educational systems. Many of the teachers of English cannot speak or understand the spoken form of the language they are teaching.² If spoken English is learnt in Korea without the assistance of a native speaker, it is almost a separate language again from English or Korean. Korean English teachers, knowing their inadequacy in spoken English, often compensate by turning the class into a translation exercise from one language to another, and to get the flavour of a true academic exercise, they explain the grammatical "niceties" of the language.³ This

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makes the student an expert in grammar, but unfortunately, that is as far as his English abilities go. There is also a scarcity of good, "modern scientifically acceptable teaching materials."⁴ Most of the books dive into traditional grammar explanations and use outmoded concepts. Many of the books are based on British English of the 1950's, or equally "strange" dialects of American English. All these things hinder the student in his ability to learn the language.

Perhaps the only real solution to these problems would be an influx of trained native English speakers for a period that would allow Korean teachers to become masters of their field. Of course before the trained native English teachers could be effective, they would have to know certain things regarding the Korean language and especially Korean customs. Mari-Luci

² James W. New, "English Teaching on the Rim of Asia," in *Language Learning*, 1963, 8, No. 3, p. 69.

³ New, p. 69.

⁴ New, p. 69.

¹ Hei Sook Lee, "English Korean Cognates" in *Language Learning*, 1958, 8, No. 4, p. 57.

Jaramillo has stated that she believes "that wherever we are teaching, at home or abroad, understanding cultural differences is just as important as having an excellent curriculum, knowing appropriate technique, or having adequate materials in the classroom."⁵

In Korea the classroom, student-teacher relationship is quite different from our more relaxed atmosphere. Korean students are used to a strict teaching technique with little emphasis on discussion. In this kind of atmosphere "sometimes the informality of North Americans is interpreted to mean that we do not really much care about anything."⁶ So the teacher should be careful of creating the wrong atmosphere and be aware of cultural taboos that exist in the culture of his students. This, however, does not mean that the teacher should become completely "Koreanized" in his teaching methods. Language is so closely related with culture that we should not only teach English, but also the culture of our Western ways. It is a good thing to discuss cultural differences in the classroom. This will bring about good communication and understanding and also prepare the students for an experience in the English speaking world.⁷

As stated, the TESOL teacher should also be aware of certain problems caused by the Korean language that will influence his students' English learning ability. The Korean language uses a "semi-syllabary" as its phonetic basis.⁸ As may be expected, "it is difficult to teach English pronunciation to Koreans, because the phonemes are different phonetically in English and Korean."⁹ Following is a Korean-English Phonemic chart which shows certain important differences in the phonemic structures of

the languages.

The English /t/ has a voiced flapped allophone in certain positions. The English vowels have allophones of different length. Phonetically English /e/ and /o/ have an upward glide.¹⁰ As can be seen, the following English sounds do not exist in Korean: labio dentals (f), (v); interdental (θ), (ð); alveolar fricative (z), also (ʒ) does not exist. Koreans front the following sounds (t), (d), (s), (n) and (r). Koreans have great difficulty with the English rounded [r]. The Korean [r] is unrounded. In Korean aspiration is a significant phonetic feature, whereas in English it is not.¹¹ So phonetically, there are some major difficulties to be overcome.

One way of doing this would be to concentrate on English-Korean Cognates, thus bring about confidence for the beginner. Hei Sook Lee has compiled a list of cognates, but since then it has no doubt changed.¹² However, this list would still be valuable in overcoming the initial lack of confidence in a student. Naturally, cognates such as 'gas' and 'card' are pronounced in the Korean fashion - kasu and kardu, but with practice, a good English pronunciation could be created; An interesting morphemic feature of the cognates is that they are only used in the singular form. In Korean there is no morpheme like the English bound plural morphemes -[s]. There is the plural morpheme -[dul] that can be attached to nouns, pronouns or adverbs, but it can be omitted if the sentence or phrase contains a word which is plural in meaning; [han caek] - one book, [du caek] or [du caek dul] - two books. Thus, the cognates are only used in the singular form. Other morphemic features of the language exist that the TESOL teacher would be wise to know so he can be an effective teacher.

Korean sentence order has the verb at the end of the sentence with the next most important word next to it, and so on. Usually, if all words are of nearly equal importance, the order is time, subject, place,

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⁵ Mari-Luci Jaramillo, "Cultural Differences in the ESOL Classroom," in *TESOL Quarterly*, 7, 1, Mar. '73, p. 57.

⁶ Jaramillo, p. 57.

⁷ Jaramillo, p. 57.

⁸ Allen D. Clark, *Korean Grammar for Language Students*(Seoul: The Christian Literature Society of Korea, 1965, p. 6.

⁹ Lee, p. 63.

¹⁰ Lee, p. 64.

¹¹ Lee, p. 64.

¹² Lee, p. 69.

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indirect object, verb.¹³ Thus, the TESOL teacher must spend a lot of time on sentence word order. I have found that this is one of the most difficult things for Koreans to master.

It is the nature of the Koreans to never give up in face of hard work. The TESOL teacher will be amazed by their desire to learn and try. He could be discouraged by their lack of confidence, but through an effort on both sides, this can be overcome.

¹³ Anthony V. Vandesande and Francis Y.T. Park. *Myongdo's Korean '6 2 Part 1* (Seoul: Myngdo Institute, 1968) p. 67.

PHONEMIC CHART

Summaries of English and Korean Phonemic Systems

English			Korean		
CONSONANTS					
p	t	k	p ^h	t ^h	k ^h
b	d	g	b	d	g
f	s	h	s	s ^h	
θ	z				
v	z				
m	n	ŋ	m	n	ŋ
	l				
	r			r	
w	y		w	y	
VOWELS					
i		u	i	i̇	u
ɪ		u			
e	ə	o	ɛ	ö	o
ɛ		ɔ			
æ			æ	a	
	a				
DIPHTHONGS					
ai, au, oi			ya, yo, yo, ua, uo, iae, ie, ui, li, uae, ue.		